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Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
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Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development, as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference

Synthesis report on best practices and lessons learned on the objective and themes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

An advance, unedited copy of the synthesis report was submitted to the first intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in January 2011. The present report has been edited and revised to reflect additional input and views from participants at the intersessional meeting on the objective and themes of the Conference and is submitted to the Preparatory Committee at its second session for further consideration and discussion, as part of the preparatory process for the Conference.

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I. Introduction

1. At its first meeting, in May 2010, the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development decided to seek information, inputs and contributions, including through a questionnaire addressed to Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, international financial institutions, major groups and other stakeholders, on their experiences, including success factors, challenges and risks, with respect to the objective and themes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. An unedited advance copy of the synthesis report was considered during the intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee in January 2011.

2. A total of 108 responses to the questionnaire had been received by 18 January 2011. Of the 49 responses from Member States, 24 were from developed countries, including one common submission from the European Union and its member States, and 25 were from developing countries or countries with economies in transition. Responses were also received from 32 organizations or consolidated networks of major groups and from 27 United Nations system organizations. All the responses are available on the website for the Conference.[1]

3. The present report seeks to synthesize the main points in an objective, balanced and coherent manner based on replies to the questionnaire and other statements, as appropriate.[2]

II. Renewed political commitment for sustainable development

A. Experiences

4. High-level ownership of the sustainable development agenda and transparency in information-sharing and decision-making are key factors that reinforce political commitment to sustainable development.

5. Political commitment is best measured through legislation and policy at the national and regional levels. Factors such as budgetary allocation, development of institutions and stakeholder participation are strong indicators of political commitment translated into action.

6. Quantitative indicators (such as budgetary allocation and financial support) can be effective, but are not always easy to measure. Qualitative indicators (such as new policy reforms, public opinion and media interest), applied to key sustainable development priorities, facilitate evaluation of the sustainability framework, highlighting conflicts and trade-offs.[3] Monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms are also important. Economic indicators remain important, while

[1] www.uncsd2012.org.

[2] Because of the limited number of replies received from developing countries, efforts were made to review statements made by developing countries at the Second Committee during the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly and at the first intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee.

[3] Common response of the European Union and its member States.

others, such as equity, gender mainstreaming and stakeholder participation, and comprehensive indicators (e.g., the Human Development Index) are also valuable.[4]

7. Many major groups highlighted indicators showing whether Governments have institutionalized the participation and inclusion of civil society, transparency of political commitments and whether previous commitments have been implemented. Respect for human rights, for example by adopting an instrument such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was also given a high ranking.[5] Media interest is not considered a reliable indicator by some groups, due to its volatility and lack of objectivity,[6] although its role in raising public awareness was recognized as important.

8. Most United Nations system organizations prioritized indicators for measuring peace and security, human rights, political governance and administration, economic and corporate governance and private sector development. Ratification of multilateral environmental agreements and whether a sustainable development framework takes into account the requirements of inclusive, holistic, balanced and integrated development were also seen as important.

9. Member States and United Nations system organizations generally reported stronger commitment to sustainable development over the past 20 years, at both the national and international levels. New international and regional conventions have been adopted in the field of the environment, with an estimated 500 international conventions and instruments since 1992, when the concept of sustainable development was formally recognized and placed at the heart of the Rio agenda.[7] This expansion reflects growing awareness of the importance and urgency of sustainable development issues.[8] However, political commitment should not be measured only by the number of adopted conventions and declarations since 1992, but also by implementation. Some acknowledged continued gaps between political commitments and actual implementation, coordination and enforcement.[9]

10. Implementation of international agreements is seriously constrained in many countries by lack of access to financial resources, weak commercial viability of required investments, inadequate and inappropriate human, financial, technical and institutional capacity dedicated to implementation and evaluation,[10] and limited public awareness. Raising public awareness through environmental and sustainable development education and promoting sustainable lifestyles can help instil personal responsibility and commitment in individuals and communities.[11]

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[4] Ecuador.

[5] Key organizations of the women's major group.

[6] International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), others.

[7] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by the Group of 77 and China.

[8] Common response of the European Union and its member States.

[9] Intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, statements by Cuba, Pakistan and Switzerland, others.

[10] Mauritius, Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Caribbean regional report for the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, document LC/CAR/L.258. Available from www.eclac.org.

[11] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report, Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by Israel.

11. Balance among the three pillars of sustainable development varies among countries at different stages of development and with different resource endowments. Social and economic development remains the highest priority for developing countries, and some emphasized the importance of the social dimension of sustainable development, including social empowerment, social justice and inclusion in decision-making.[12] While a number of countries have made considerable progress, for many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, progress remains insufficient to reach development goals related to poverty eradication.[13] Nevertheless, progress in improving economic governance and mobilizing resources for investment is evident across the continent. South Africa's legislation and national programmes for sustainable management of water, energy, waste and industrial development provide inspiration for continued progress.[14]

12. Links between development and the environment could feature more prominently in the Millennium Development Goals,[15] and the Conference should aim to place the Goals within the framework of sustainable development.[16] Brazil's recent history — including increased basic education, a drop in unemployment, strong growth in gross domestic product (GDP), a boost in agricultural production and a clear decline in deforestation rates — demonstrates success in advancing the three pillars of sustainable development in a coordinated manner.[17]

13. A shift in the political discourse on sustainable development has taken place over the past two decades, departing from issues such as sustainable housing, employment and public transport. It now focuses more on climate change, CO_2 reductions, industry shifts and renewable energy. As for climate change, there is consensus around the need for catastrophe planning, disaster risk reduction and adaptation and mitigation strategies.[18] Because many developed Member States have yet to achieve the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI) for official development assistance (ODA), and because political declarations do not always lead to actual policies, scepticism was voiced by some countries as to whether political commitment was adequate.[19]

B. Success factors

14. Political support has manifested itself at the international level through the proliferation of multilateral environmental agreements; at the regional and subregional levels through political alliances and partnerships such as the African Union and its development of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Global Island Partnership, the Caribbean Community, the Organization

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[12] Intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, statements by Brazil, Nepal (on behalf of the least developed countries) and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

[13] Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Sustainable Development Report on Africa: Five-Year Review of the Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development Outcomes in Africa. Available at www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/sdd/documents/SDRA.pdf.

[14] South Africa.

[15] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by Norway.

[16] Intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, statement by the European Union.

[17] Brazil.

[18] Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future.

[19] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statements by Bangladesh, India, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

of Eastern Caribbean States and the Pacific Islands Forum; at the national level through national sustainable development strategies, national sustainable development councils and increased inter-ministerial coordination; and at the local level through local Agenda 21 plans and similar community programmes, including increased support for major groups.

15. Formulation and implementation of national sustainable development strategies or their equivalents, inter-ministerial and other coordinating mechanisms and establishment of sustainable development ministries,[20] offices or focal entities in some countries reflect growing political support for sustainable development by integrating sustainable development dimensions into public policy and increasing the participation of relevant stakeholders in its creation and implementation.

16. Green workplace initiatives, green procurement, green growth, green investing,[21] green taxes,[22] eco-labelling, increased social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility, improved access to drinking water and sanitation, development of and investment in renewable energy technologies, including through feed-in tariffs and carbon offsets under the clean development mechanism, carbon emissions trading, activities surrounding the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, public campaigns addressing climate change and recognition of indigenous rights were all cited by various respondents as manifestations of increased political and policy support for sustainable development.

17. Specific industry sectors and thematic areas where national political commitment to achieve sustainable development goals was cited as especially strong include energy, climate change, the Millennium Development Goals, sustainable water management, sustainable consumption and production, sustainable tourism,[23] forests and deforestation,[24] and natural resource and biodiversity protection. The level of political commitment to the development of renewable energy has been encouraging in a number of countries, including through green stimulus spending.[25] Some noted specific commitments to wind energy,[26] addressing water and air pollution,[27] waste management,[28] sustainable communities,[29] increasing opportunities for socially vulnerable people to participate in the labour market,[30] education[31] and combating HIV/AIDS.[32] In some countries, national initiatives to respect the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities (e.g., the Indian Forest Law) have triggered formal recognition of the territorial rights of indigenous

[20] Australia.
[21] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.
[22] Sweden.
[23] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statements by Gabon and the Gambia.
[24] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.
[25] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by Ethiopia.
[26] Germany and Scotland (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), as noted by the European Students' Forum.
[27] Czech Republic, Poland, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).
[28] Lithuania.
[29] Ireland, Japan, Sustainable Development Commission of the United Kingdom, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
[30] Lithuania.
[31] United Republic of Tanzania.
[32] Botswana, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

peoples and local communities over forests and other ecosystems and consolidation of traditional sustainable management practices.[33]

18. United Nations system organizations highlighted support for human health, food and agriculture, sustainable urban planning and transport, forests and small island developing States. One organization noted good examples of national level or federally supported policies. programmes and laws promoting local action for biodiversity in Austria, Belgium, Brazil, South Africa and Spain.[34]

19. Support for climate change action and for the Millennium Development Goals is interlinked with support for sustainable development, as are campaigns to reduce child labour, enhance human rights and equality, combat HIV/AIDS and respond to natural disasters.[35] The responses of the global community to recent global crises — financial, food, energy — were reasonably successful and should generate responses to long-term crises that will determine the sustainability of growth and development.[36]

C. Challenges

20. The highest priorities mentioned for accelerating progress towards sustainable development over the coming decade include: achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other development goals; securing a global agreement on climate change; promoting a fair transition to a green economy, including increased energy efficiency and use of renewable energy; protecting biodiversity, including fisheries; promoting good environmental governance; and mainstreaming education for sustainable development. Human and indigenous rights, social protection, decent work for all and empowering youth and women were also mentioned.

21. Respondents stressed policy coherence[37] and establishing mutually reinforcing commitments, including a clear post-2015 framework that has sustainable development at its core;[38] research on combating the effects of climate change, including on aquatic ecosystems;[39] and ensuring support for communities in implementing local Agenda 21 plans.[40] Developed countries must take concrete steps to fulfil commitments on increasing financial assistance, reducing and cancelling debt, curbing trade barriers, opening markets, transferring technology and building capacity in the least developed countries.[41]

22. International preparations for the Conference should strengthen support for sustainable development by, inter alia: renewing political commitment; reforming institutional responses; providing a platform for exchanging best practices and lessons learned; supporting national priorities through technical and financial

[33] Key organizations of the women's major group.
[34] United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).
[35] Botswana, ITUC.
[36] World Bank.
[37] ITUC, European Trade Union Confederation, WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature/World Wildlife Fund).
[38] Intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, statement by the European Union; WWF, Global Ecovillage Network.
[39] World Aquarium and Conservation for the Oceans Foundation.
[40] Global Ecovillage Network.
[41] Intersessional meeting, statement by Nepal on behalf of the least developed countries.

assistance, coordinating resources and intensifying cooperation among regions through comprehensive, multi-level and multi-stakeholder processes.[42]

D. Risks

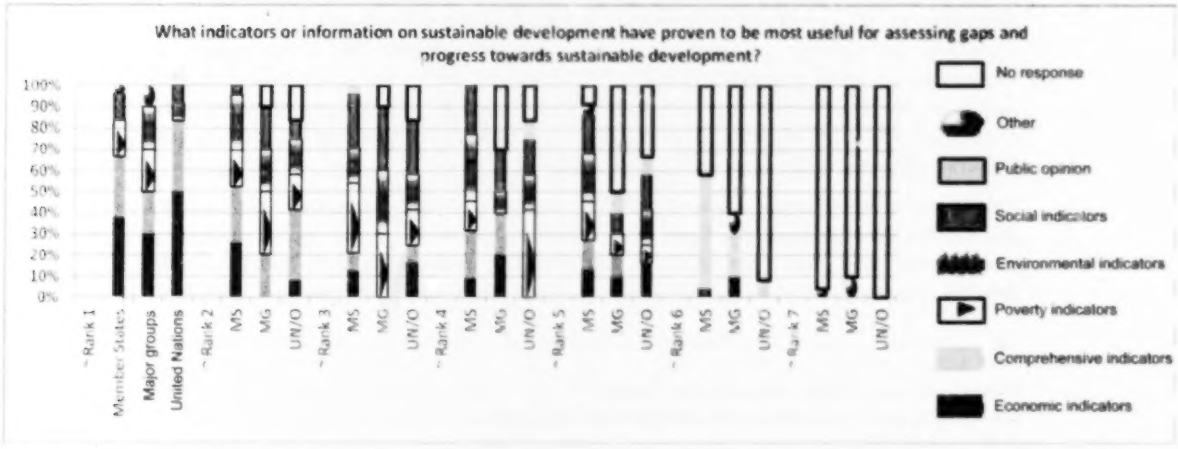
23. There can be difficult trade-offs among the three pillars of sustainable development, and yet they can be strongly complementary. The most prominent arguments against environmental regulation and initiatives claim little or no economic benefit, or that the economic costs are too high, but these arguments rarely consider the costs of externalities or future costs, effectively devaluing the environmental pillar and the welfare of future generations.[43]

III. Assessing progress and remaining gaps in implementation

A. Experiences

24. Comprehensive assessments based on development of core indicators were provided by many respondents.[44] Economic indicators were ranked as the most useful, followed closely by comprehensive, poverty, environmental and social indicators (see figure I). Outcome indicators were ranked as the most useful indicators of integrated goals and strategies (see figure II). One Member State highlighted the informal benchmark indicator of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that a nation should spend between 1.5 per cent and 2 per cent of GDP to achieve a clean and green economy.[45]

Figure I



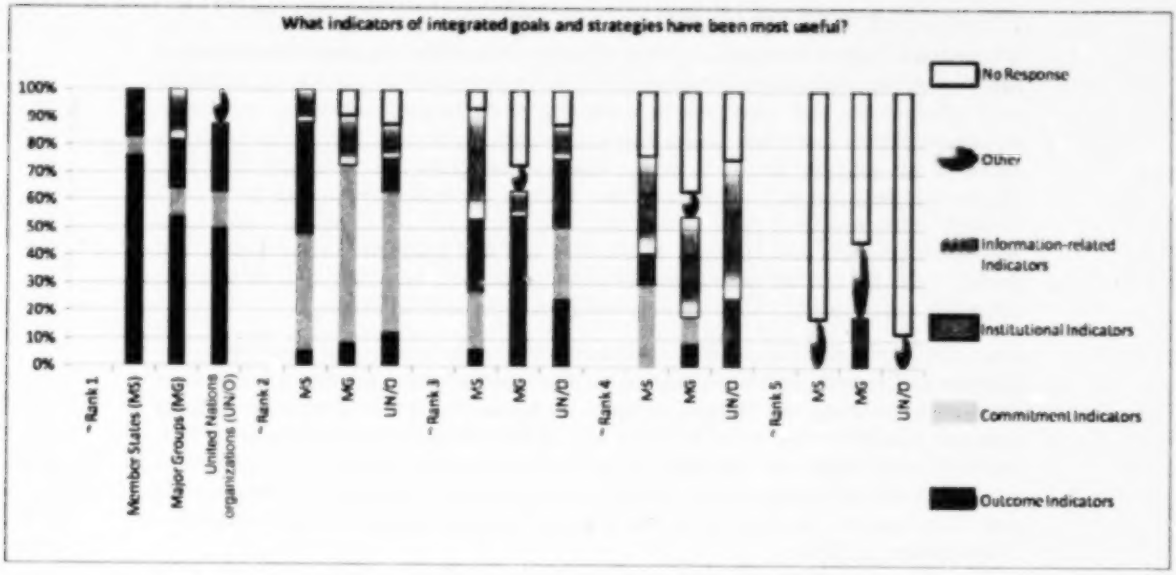
[42] Common response of the European Union and its member States.

[43] Children and youth major group through the Conference youth caucus.

[44] All studies are referenced in the compilation of responses to the questionnaire. Available at www.uncsd2012.org.

[45] United States of America.

Figure II



25. Based in part on such indicators, progress has been recorded in the overall integration of sustainable development principles into economic and social policy development, the development of renewable energy technologies and infrastructure[46] and the inclusion and protection of the rights of women and indigenous peoples. Member States mostly cited studies measuring progress in implementing national sustainable development strategies and specific policies and measures at the national level. Most United Nations system organizations, including the regional commissions, catalogued studies on progress through global and regional efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; monitor progress in energy, agriculture and biodiversity; assess the state of the global environment, such as the Global Environmental Outlook reports prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);[47] and implement regional programmes such as NEPAD[48] and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre.[49]

26. The global financial and economic crisis caused setbacks to progress made in poverty eradication. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia still remain far from the 2015 target.[50] However, notable progress has been made in India where the population share below the national poverty line fell from 36 per cent in 1993/94 to 25 per cent in 2009, with micro, small and medium enterprises providing employment for about 60 million people and contributing about 8 per cent of GDP. The largest flagship programme to tackle rural poverty is the Mahatma Gandhi

[46] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statements by Ethiopia, Kenya, Peru, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.

[47] UNEP, available from www.unep.org/geo/GEO_Meetings.asp.

[48] ECA.

[49] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.

[50] *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.I.7).

national rural employment guarantee scheme, providing employment security for the rural poor by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment in a financial year.[51]

27. At the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals concluded that developing countries as a group have had successes in achieving some targets, including improving school enrolment and child health and in expanding access to clean water. Yet, as noted in the outcome document of the Meeting, progress has been uneven among regions and between and within countries. Hunger and malnutrition rose from 2007 through 2009, reversing prior gains, and food prices are rising again. There have been slow progress and setbacks in reaching full and productive employment and decent work for all, advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, achieving environmental sustainability and providing basic sanitation.[52]

28. The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Nagoya, Japan, resulted in a number of important initiatives, including the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits arising from their Utilization (decision X/1, annex I) and established clear steps to increase cooperation among the Conventions adopted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, leading up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012.

29. Some countries have made considerable progress in slowing the rate of deforestation since the adoption of the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests (the Forest Principles) in Rio de Janeiro and the establishment of the United Nations Forum on Forests. Norway and Indonesia have been at the forefront of a group of countries that have launched a global initiative to reduce deforestation and forest degradation (REDD plus), with $3.5 billion in financing pledged so far. Brazil reported that the rate of deforestation in the Amazon over the past year was the slowest in 22 years and expressed its determination to continue to slow it.

30. Under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Member States succeeded in brokering agreements covering mitigation, adaptation, deforestation, financing and technology transfer in 2010. Developed countries are reportedly fulfilling their promise to contribute $30 billion in "fast-start" funding in the next three years. Particularly important for developing countries was the creation of a framework to enhance action on adaptation and mechanisms to facilitate technology transfer.

31. The World Water Forums, organized by the World Water Council, have served to catalyse political interest and commitment to address water issues directly related to sustainable development. The Global Water Partnership has also promoted integrated water resources management through its extensive regional and country-level networks.[53]

32. Progress in the right to access to information (principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development) has been recorded by the World

[51] India.

[52] General Assembly resolution 65/1.

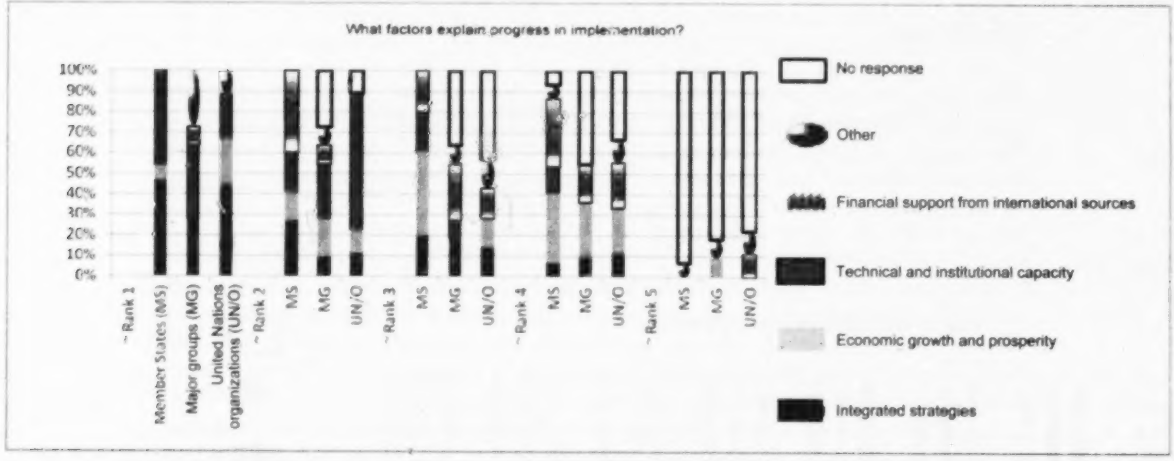
[53] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Resources Institute and its Access Initiative partners.[54] Community-level "social audits" of poverty-related spending in India, recently given official backing in one Indian state, demonstrate the potential power of information in the hands of the poor.[55]

B. Success factors

33. Use of integrated strategies and investment in institutional and technical capacity are rated equally highly in explaining progress in implementation (see figure III). Most countries have introduced integrated planning and decision-making for sustainable development through national sustainable development strategies, poverty reduction strategy papers and other strategies and plans, and most are supported by United Nations system organizations, particularly the regional commissions, and international financial institutions. Regardless of the different tools or titles used, integrated planning and decision-making are essential for progress.[56]

Figure III



34. In many developing countries, the ministries of the environment and health have little input in the development of poverty reduction strategy papers and vulnerable groups are often not involved.[57] One regional commission noted that such papers currently reinforce a preoccupation with short-term poverty reduction interventions, paying little attention to intergenerational equity considerations, and advised countries to develop national sustainable development strategies to be implemented in stages taking into account short-, medium- and long-term development objectives.[58] The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNEP highlighted cooperation under the Poverty-Environment Initiative to integrate environmental concerns in national poverty reduction and economic

[54] Access Initiative.
[55] L. Polgreen, "Indian state empowers poor to fight corruption", *New York Times*, 2 December 2010.
[56] International Council for Science (ICSU).
[57] Key organizations of the women's major group.
[58] ECA.

development strategies in countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific.[59]

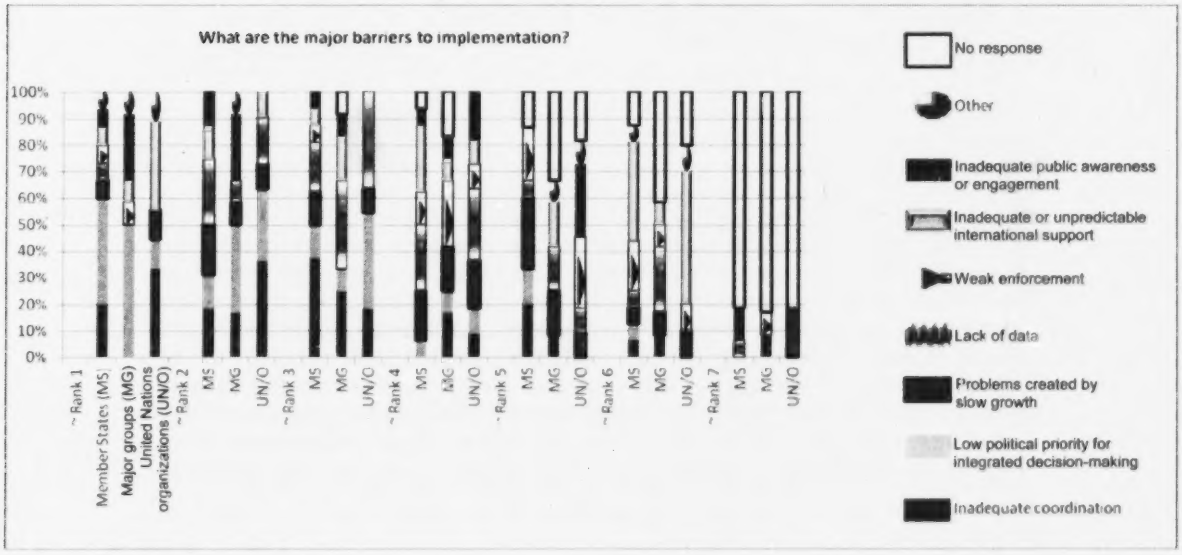
35. Public-private partnerships are promoted in various forms by many countries, emphasizing corporate social responsibility in some cases. A number of responses highlighted involvement in United Nations partnerships for sustainable development as an outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Member States most often cited public-private partnerships in public service delivery such as waste management, water, energy and transport. The Clean Technology Fund with $4.5 billion in concessional finance is expected to mobilize co-financing of about $35 billion, including $12 billion from the private sector.[60] One respondent noted with concern that partnerships for provision of public services such as water and energy have often led to reduced quality of service provision and corruption.[61]

36. Technical assistance from the United Nations system is important for many developing countries and can be especially helpful for agriculture, biodiversity, water, energy and climate change. Many major groups also benefit from such assistance.

C. Challenges

37. "Low political priority for integrated decision-making" was ranked by the majority of Member States and major groups as the biggest barrier to implementation. The majority of United Nations system organizations ranked "inadequate coordination between ministries" and "inadequate or unpredictable international support" equally as the biggest barriers to implementation (see figure IV).

Figure IV



[59] See www.unpei.org.
[60] World Bank.
[61] ITUC.

38. Many different steps could be taken to bridge implementation gaps, with efforts aimed at increasing political will and commitment, improving coordination at all levels, increasing awareness, communicating with the public and providing information ranking highest. Actions should also continue to ensure the use of economic instruments contributing to market transparency and shaping prices that reflect the real economic, social and environmental costs of activities. Some Member States noted the need to take action to phase out environmentally harmful subsidies.[62] One Member State said that disparities between the trade regimes and multilateral environmental agreements, such as those between the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) regime and the Convention on Biological Diversity regarding patenting genetic resources, needed to be thoroughly addressed.[63] Another stated that not all countries perceived such disparities.[64]

39. At the regional and subregional levels, efforts to promote collective action on key political and economic issues, together with accelerated regional economic integration, would also help to bridge implementation gaps, as would increasing accountability and transparency, basic good governance skills and peace and stability.[65]

40. Limited technical capacity and financial resources are recurrent challenges to effective implementation. The resources needed for HIV prevention, AIDS care and treatment and impact mitigation, for example, constitute a significant proportion of GNI in the highest burden countries of sub-Saharan Africa.[66] Small island developing States reported severe constraints in monitoring and evaluating sustainable development progress due to a lack of national disaggregated data systems and weak analytical capabilities.

41. The main difficulties experienced in promoting integrated planning and decision-making include lack of transparency in the decision-making process relating to development, lack of public participation in planning processes, lack of coordination among government ministries and agencies with competing priorities, and lack of human resources and technology capacity. Some vulnerable Member States highlighted the impact of environmental degradation and pollution as a primary challenge,[67] while others noted difficulties for some decision makers to look at issues from a long-term viewpoint,[68] while trade-offs exist among the objectives of sectoral authorities.[69] Unclear mandates, low accountability and the absence of institutional mechanisms for joint work and collaboration all exacerbate these problems, which were also found in the United Nations system.[70]

42. Implementation of national sustainable development strategies and similar strategies and plans must be given much higher priority, while investment in science and technology for sustainable development must be significantly stepped up.[71]

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[62] Poland, Argentina.

[63] India.

[64] Intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, statement by Japan.

[65] Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by the Republic of Korea.

[66] UNAIDS.

[67] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.

[68] World Aquarium and Conservation for the Oceans Foundation.

[69] ITUC.

[70] WWF.

[71] ICSU.

Institutional and financial support of initiatives by major groups (e.g., education for sustainable development, local Agenda 21 plans) would also enhance implementation.[72]

43. Further actions could be taken to promote partnerships for sustainable development and provide support to umbrella stakeholder organizations to facilitate more effective participation.[73] Instruments of corporate social responsibility should be promoted more actively,[74] as should links between business and sustainable development.[75] Better education for sustainable development could significantly contribute to shaping conditions for promotion of partnerships.[76]

D. Risks

44. The main risks include: a focus on economic growth to the exclusion of other issues; vested economic and industry interests in various sectors (energy, agriculture, mining); lack of shared vision; weak leadership; failure to reach agreement in multilateral negotiations, particularly on trade and climate change; failure to deliver on existing commitments, especially regarding ODA; poor integration of and coherence among different strategies; increased natural and global disasters affecting the world's most vulnerable people; and political conflict.

IV. Addressing new and emerging challenges

A. Experiences

45. All countries face many similar challenges, but they differ widely in their ability to cope with risks and shocks. Challenges have been intensified in developing countries by poverty, competition for scarce resources, rapid rural-to-urban migration and the concomitant challenges to provide food, infrastructure and access to basic health, water and energy services.

46. While there have been important economic benefits of global market integration through trade and investment, there are also increased economic risks, for example from greater financial market interdependence. Greater economic interdependence requires stronger cooperation in addressing the sustainable development challenges that result.[77]

47. The high levels of vulnerability of the environmental, economic and social systems of small island developing States were highlighted in the recent High-level Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island States, held by the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth

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[72] Hungary.

[73] Belgium, Global Ecovillage Network, others.

[74] Switzerland, Poland.

[75] UN-Habitat.

[76] Czech Republic.

[77] Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, *Lessons from Global Environmental Assessments* (Bilthoven, Netherlands, September 2008), p. 8.

session. Small island developing States have made little progress, or even regressed, especially in terms of poverty reduction and debt sustainability.

48. New and emerging challenges include: climate change and related natural disasters; interrelated financial, economic and food crises; energy security; degradation of ecosystems (in particular marine ecosystems) and diminishing natural resources, including water scarcity; political instability and social unrest; unsustainable consumption and production; and the impacts of population growth and rapid urbanization. One Member State responded that, instead of identifying new and emerging issues, the focus should remain on integrating issues and understanding their potential multiple effects.[78]

49. Many types of mechanisms to address challenges at the national and local levels often encompassed the same policies and programmes that were outlined in the assessments of progress. Other measures related specifically to disaster preparedness and early warning systems, climate change adaptation (notably in small island developing States), shifting to renewable energy and addressing water scarcity. Several Member States described multidimensional approaches in disaster reduction and risk management: one achieved significant progress by establishing a socio-economic model that reduces vulnerability and invests in social capital through universal access to government services and promotion of social equity;[79] another established an early warning network to alert citizens of anticipated disasters through mobile telephones and constructing multi-hazard warning towers in coastal areas.[80] Public education on disasters, meteorological research, early warning systems, effective communication systems, comprehensive plans and civil defence structures are all recognized as important resources in reducing risk.[81]

50. Support from the international community has been forthcoming with regard to climate change, energy efficiency and security, food security, the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty eradication, rural development, capacity-building and combating disease. Enhanced support to Member States, including for institutional and policy reform, enhancing agricultural productivity, water sector development,[82] reversing degradation of marine ecosystems,[83] waste management[84] and population management[85] were cited as priorities. Inadequate attention has been given to ocean acidification,[86] with little emphasis given to providing political, legal and other support to community initiatives to conserve and restore biodiversity.[87]

51. Although some agree that emerging challenges should be acted upon at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, others insisted that the Conference should focus on its two agreed themes.

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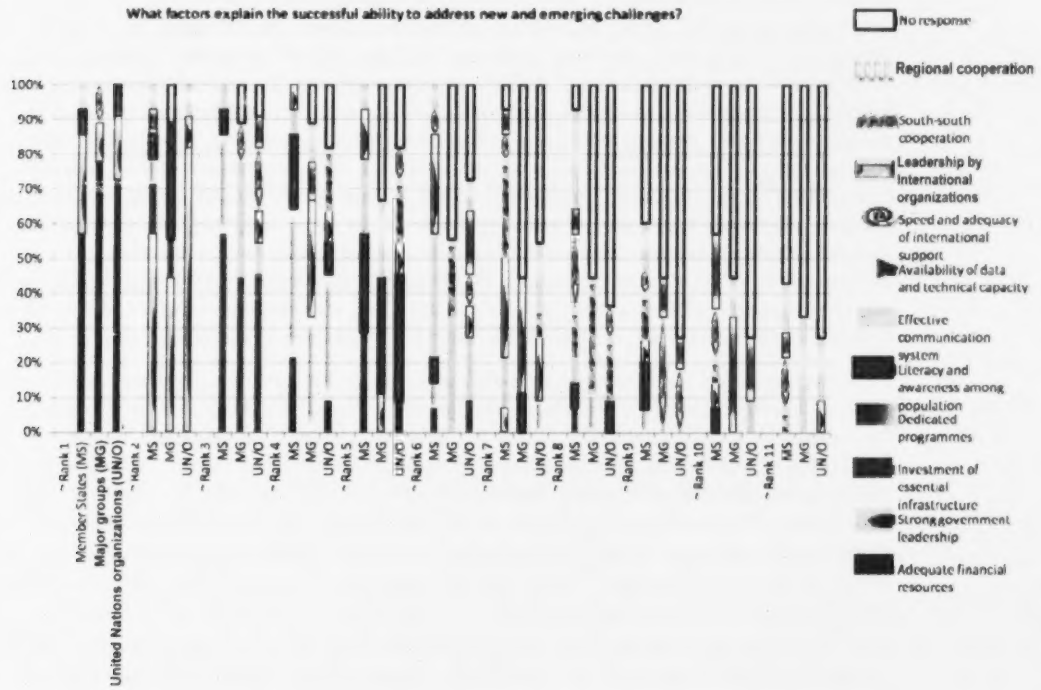
[78] Belgium.
[79] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by Cuba.
[80] Ibid., statement by Sri Lanka.
[81] India; ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.
[82] United Republic of Tanzania.
[83] Croatia.
[84] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.
[85] Philippines.
[86] International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme.
[87] Key organizations of the women's major group.

B. Success factors

52. "Adequate financial resources" was ranked by nearly all as the most important factor in successfully addressing new and emerging challenges; "strong government leadership" ranked second (see figure V). Long-term strategies, increasing South-South and regional cooperation, promotion of good governance, programmes to improve energy efficiency and energy saving, investment in infrastructure (including information technology), programmes to raise awareness of sustainable development, regional cooperation on water management and building technical capacity for data collection and monitoring are examples of steps taken to enhance success factors.

Figure V



53. One Member State has established a sustainable development fund that coherently and predictably allocates funds for sustainable development projects and programmes.[88] Another has established a national fund on climate change, the first to use funds from the profits of an oil supply chain to finance mitigation and adaptation to climate change.[89] Still another highlighted implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, contributions to the Adaptation Fund and commitment to "fast start finance" for addressing climate change in developing countries.[90] Multi-party

[88] Italy.

[89] "Brazil set to meet low-carbon targets four years early", Environment News Service, 27 October 2010.

[90] Spain.

democracy, implementation of a common market under the East Africa Community and implementation of a programme for local government reforms were cited by another as factors enhancing success.[91]

54. Major groups also highlighted their influence on success factors, noting that in India and the Russian Federation strong emphasis is placed upon literacy and education of young people as future stakeholders and decision makers.[92] The Barbados Workers' Union successfully urged the Government of Barbados to invest more in agriculture, halt using farmland for other uses and support food production.[93]

C. Challenges

55. Strengthening links among scientific research, education and policy through, inter alia, increasing political commitment to science-based education, increasing funding for research and innovation, emphasizing policy decisions based on both natural and social sciences, supporting technology development and transfer, maintaining the momentum of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development[94] and stimulating non-formal learning, especially by youth-led organizations,[95] were all recommended. One Member State reported recent success in increasing the number of science and engineering graduates, and their subsequent contributions to sustainable development.[96]

56. A strengthened science-policy interface building on the experience with multilateral environmental agreements could add value in other areas. Relevant national and regional experiences provide valuable input (e.g., national sustainable development councils, the European Environment Agency's *European Environment: State and Outlook 2010* consultation process, UNEP Global Environmental Outlook and others).[97]

57. International support should better coordinate research, foster collaboration and dialogue, build partnerships and improve international governance, including reform of the Bretton Woods institutions. Global science organizations, in cooperation with Governments and relevant United Nations system organizations, are taking steps to enhance the delivery of data, information and understanding on sustainable development challenges and on solutions, but these efforts need additional resources.[98] The United Nations system, in cooperation with other international organizations, is working with Governments to strengthen the statistical base for sustainable development decision-making through refinement of the System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting.

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[91] United Republic of Tanzania.

[92] World Aquarium and Conservation for the Oceans Foundation.

[93] ITUC.

[94] ICSU, Natural Resources Defense Council.

[95] Children and youth major group, through the Commission on Sustainable Development youth caucus.

[96] Croatia.

[97] Common response of the European Union and its member States.

[98] ICSU.

D. Risks

58. The highest risks are to the poorest and most vulnerable communities. Increasing efforts in vulnerable countries should be prioritized through investment and targeted partnerships where capacity-building for resilience to external shocks is required: climate change mitigation and adaptation; rural and small-scale agriculture; diffusion of low-cost and low-technology solutions for energy and water provision; protection of marine and coastal resources and fisheries; investment in infrastructure; promotion of secure jobs; support for social safety nets; empowerment of women; recognition of indigenous peoples' rights; and addressing political conflict.

59. The risks to such vulnerable populations are addressed by national development plans in some countries,[99] but much more should be done to implement these plans through legislation and resources committed to supporting community-based policies and programmes that promote local solutions.[100] Development strategies should address not only potential risks and challenges in general, but must also specifically include assessment, including from a gender perspective, of the extent to which poor or vulnerable populations are likely to be affected.[101]

V. A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

60. There is no agreement on a common definition of a green economy. While many expressed the view that a precise definition was not necessary, others observed that imprecision can be a source of dispute as, for example, when trading partners have different understandings of what constitutes a "green" product or production method.

61. It was widely agreed that discussions on a green economy leading to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development should take the Rio Declaration and Principles as a fixed point of reference, and that doing so could address a number of concerns raised by Member States and other stakeholders.

62. Another widely shared view was that the concept of a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication was a useful one for all countries, irrespective of the level of development and resource endowment, and that it must be sufficiently broad and flexible and not based on rigid international rules or standards.

A. Experiences

63. Rather than seeking a single definition of a green economy, it is more useful to look at the variety of approaches and national policies considered to be consistent with most understandings of a green economy, so as to assess how they contribute to

[99] Ecuador.

[100] United Republic of Tanzania.

[101] Common response of the European Union and its member States.

sustainable development and poverty eradication. Some Member States underlined that a green economy must not be a substitute for but contribute to advancing sustainable development, reinforcing all three pillars. It should embrace both development and environmental agendas and help to create new jobs.[102] Several Member States stressed the importance of progress on the social pillar, with one referring to it as a litmus test of a green economy.[103] The Seventh African Development Forum,[104] held in October 2010, agreed that the concept of a green economy was an outcome-oriented concept deliberately aimed at improving human well-being without undermining the resource base that current and future generations depend on for their livelihoods.

64. Many indicated the importance of developing green economy strategies at the regional and national levels involving different sectors and multiple stakeholders. The main benefit of a green economy strategy is strengthening the three pillars of sustainable development in a wide range of sectors. To have legitimacy, the concept of a green economy must be given content through consultation with and engagement of all stakeholders. A number of Member States and major groups noted that there were as many green economies as there were development paths, with no one-size-fits-all solution.[105]

65. Differences exist on the relative emphasis to be accorded to different types of green economy policies (e.g., internalization of environmental externalities in prices, taxes and subsidies, and public expenditures on green infrastructure and technologies), but there is broad agreement that some sectors clearly belong to any working concept of a green economy, including renewable energy, energy and material efficiency improvements and sustainable buildings. Many also agree on the importance of a supportive fiscal policy framework.

66. It was widely noted that green economy policies could save energy, reduce emissions, utilize resources more efficiently and open new areas of economic development. As one Member State noted, green development would strike a balance between social and economic development and resource and environmental conservation, thereby contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.[106]

67. Most emerging economies have some policies in place that relate to the concept of a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, although these vary considerably in terms of their degree of ambition and impact: in China and the Republic of Korea, the "green" share of national stimulus packages was among the highest in the world. In South Africa and 20 other developing countries, renewable energy feed-in tariffs have been approved or are being developed, and in Brazil, considerable Government support, both financial and non-financial, has been provided for biofuels.[107] Putting a price on pollution through economic policy instruments, such as environmental taxes and emissions

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[102] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by Serbia.

[103] Brazil, Belgium, others.

[104] See www.uneca.org/adfvii.

[105] India, ITUC, others.

[106] Intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, talking points on a green economy, delegation of China.

[107] WWF.

trading schemes, was cited by several Member States[108] as one of the most effective ways of promoting a green economy. Policies that strengthen incentives for stakeholders to adopt more sustainable production and consumption choices were also emphasized.[109]

68. Strong national political leadership is recognized as important to enable the transition to a green economy, projecting a green economy as a vision and engaging the private sector and all of society in its realization.[110]

69. Legislation and institutions must be effective, while limiting the administrative burden on businesses. There is great potential for spreading green technology through the development of standards. However, the challenge lies in striking a balance between drafting environmental standards and preventing the creation of new barriers to international trade, in particular trade with developing countries. One Member State stressed the need for further work on the trade and development aspects of environmental standards, including labelling and certification schemes, so as to find international solutions that support environmental and climate objectives while facilitating trade and development.[111]

70. Supported by a conducive policy framework, public and private investment provides mechanisms for the reconfiguration of businesses, infrastructure and institutions towards greater energy and resource efficiency and lower pollution and waste intensity, through adoption of sustainable consumption and production processes. Such reconfiguration should lead to more green jobs and lower the energy and materials intensities of production, waste and pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.[112]

71. Job creation is an important objective of the plan of South Africa to shift to a new resource-efficient, low-carbon, pro-employment growth path.[113] The Republic of Korea has also adopted similar strategies for green jobs.[114] The Green Jobs study[115] notes four ways in which green economy measures may affect employment: (a) creation of additional jobs, for example in manufacturing pollution-control devices and environmental consulting services; (b) substitution between jobs, for example in renewable energy instead of fossil fuels; (c) elimination of some jobs without direct replacement, as when packaging materials are discouraged or banned and their production discontinued; and (d) reorientation and re-skilling of many existing jobs, notably in construction.

72. The synergies between environmental policies and job creation should be explored in national experiences, with participation of Governments, professional associations, civil society, non-governmental organizations, financial institutions and research entities.[116] One Member State noted a policy target to create 1.4 million

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[108] Finland, Poland, United Republic of Tanzania.

[109] Finland, Convention on Biological Diversity, others.

[110] Republic of Korea.

[111] Sweden.

[112] UNEP.

[113] South Africa.

[114] Republic of Korea.

[115] *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World*, UNEP, International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization of Employers and ITUC (September, 2008).

[116] Brazil.

new environmental jobs through green innovation.[117] Green jobs could also be created for installing and operating green technologies and capital equipment, for example for improved energy, water and other resource efficiency, and for solar, wind and other renewable energy sources.

73. Most countries do not yet have an overall strategy for a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Some countries and regional groups are in the early stages of planning such strategies, and some United Nations system organizations are committed to advancing and supporting green economy initiatives through advisory and technical assistance services.[118]

74. Green economy measures should not be limited only to promoting green sectors, but should also support "greening" "brown" sectors, such as energy, petroleum and other extractive industries, chemical industries and the automotive industry, and develop new sectors with relatively low environmental impact and high social benefits, notably some services. Most emphasis was given to the energy, agriculture, transport and housing sectors as having the greatest impact.

B. Success factors

75. The most effective green economy policies include: fiscal incentives and reform, regulation and legislation; and green procurement, notably for promotion of more resource-efficient and low-emission technologies, scaling-up renewable energies and energy efficiency and stimulating development of green products.

76. Successful policies have been brought forward when the longer-term case for strong measures is made clearly, and the policies themselves are well thought through and coordinated with other policies.[119] A consultative, bottom-up approach that includes transparent communication, Government leadership and broad multi-stakeholder engagement, in particular involving young people, is needed to build support for green economy policies. Careful design of such policies for social equity is essential. The media is also a powerful tool that can help shape public perception and increase support. Availability of relevant institutional or technical capacity is important for policy design and implementation.[120]

77. Experiences with explicitly linking poverty eradication and social development with environmental policies and programmes predate the green economy discussion. These experiences, such as the United Nations Poverty-Environment Initiative, offer useful lessons.[121]

78. The 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns should also be considered a major response to the need for green economies worldwide while addressing social concerns.[122] The goal at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development must then be to ensure that

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[117] Japan.

[118] UNEP, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by the Republic of Korea.

[119] Sustainable Development Commission of the United Kingdom.

[120] Croatia, Spain, United Kingdom, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future.

[121] See www.unpei.org; see also UNDP International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (http://www.ipc-undp.org/).

[122] Common response of the European Union and its member States.

resources, technical assistance and technology transfer are made available to enable countries to participate competitively in a global green marketplace, and to ensure that green industries will also generate jobs and improve livelihoods and reduce inequality both within and between countries.[123]

C. Challenges

79. Major challenges include: reaching a global commitment for and a common understanding of a green economy for sustainable development and poverty eradication that encapsulates all aspects of global sustainability; developing a United Nations green economy road map that clarifies and stimulates the transitional steps needed at the national and international levels[124] and a toolbox or best practice guide to actions, instruments and policies to advance the green economy for sustainable development and poverty eradication concept; and realizing explicit financial commitments, such as the bilateral financial contributions of $30 million in 2009 and $250 million through 2015 by Norway to Guyana.[125]

80. Developing country respondents emphasized the imperative for developed countries to make enabling resources (financial and technological) available to developing countries in an affordable and transparent manner to achieve a gradual transition to a green economy.[126] A commitment to devote an agreed percentage of GDP or national budgets to investments related to a green economy for sustainable development and poverty eradication and a tax on financial transactions, along with regional green investment forums where green entrepreneurs and businesses could be connected with financial institutions, were suggested by one United Nations organization.[127] Access to microfinancing mechanisms for small-scale projects by local communities, especially by women, was proposed by several major groups.[128] One Member State noted that sustainability depended on the "ability to mobilize green financing to make environmentally friendly technology available to those for whom the latest technology remains financially prohibitive".[129]

81. The role of intellectual property rights, specifically the TRIPS agreement, in relation to green technologies was mentioned. Some were concerned that these rights could limit technology diffusion and transfer, while others referred to their positive contribution in this regard.[130]

D. Risks

82. The risk of conflict between green economy policies and policies related to other areas stems from real and perceived trade-offs between economic and

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[123] ECLAC.
[124] European Union.
[125] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.
[126] India, Montenegro, United Republic of Tanzania.
[127] UNEP.
[128] Key organizations of the women's major group, World Aquarium and Conservation for the Oceans Foundation.
[129] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by Seychelles.
[130] Argentina, India, Japan, WWF.

environmental outcomes. Concerns were raised regarding the costs of new green investments and how they would be financed. In addition, potential conflicts were cited between a green economy and free trade, if for example "green protectionism" were to be pursued in the name of promoting a green economy.[131] Developing countries opposed the introduction of any new conditionalities in connection with a green economy that might generate "unjustified restrictions in the areas of trade, financing and official development assistance".[132] While there is a need to remove environmentally harmful subsidies, environmentally helpful subsidies also risk becoming a growing focus of trade disputes.

83. The greatest risk arises from resisting the scale of changes required as suggested by the best available science — that is, the risk of inaction.[133]

VI. Institutional framework for sustainable development

84. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development will provide an opportunity for agreement on an ambitious and effective international environmental governance reform package and on strengthening the broader institutional framework for sustainable development. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, many United Nations bodies and international organizations have aligned their work with the principles of sustainable development, which is referred to in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1) as "a key element of the overarching framework of United Nations activities".

85. One Member State emphasized that the global institutional architecture should address global challenges such as desertification, climate change and loss of biodiversity in a way that remains firmly anchored in the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities".[134]

A. Experiences

86. The majority of Member States and United Nations system organizations ranked "strengthen existing institutions" highest, while the majority of major groups ranked "improve coordination among existing institutions" as the most important avenue for reform of the global institutional framework for sustainable development (see figure VI). Among the avenues for strengthening existing institutions, vesting them with appropriate monitoring responsibilities and mechanisms was mentioned.[135]

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[131] India.

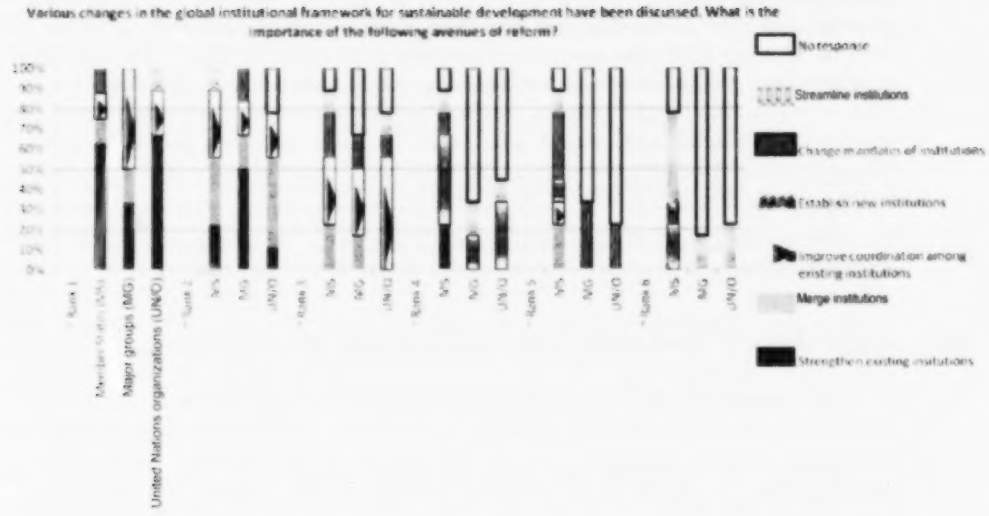
[132] Argentina, China, South Africa, others.

[133] One Earth Initiative.

[134] India.

[135] South Africa.

Figure VI


Various changes in the global institutional framework for sustainable development have been discussed. What is the importance of the following avenues of reform?
No response
Streamline institutions
Change mandates of institutions
Establish new institutions
Improve coordination among existing institutions
Merge institutions
Strengthen existing institutions
Major groups (MG)
United Nations organizations (UNO)

87. To ensure effective coordination among different agencies and organizations, some favour merging institutions, suggesting the formation of a single world environment organization or merging the Commission on Sustainable Development into an expanded Economic and Social Council with a stronger mandate for promoting sustainable development throughout the United Nations family, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. One Member State called for strengthening the Economic and Social Council as an effective forum for the multilateral discussion of economic and social themes through a sustainable development approach.[136] An international court for the environment was proposed by some major groups to address the lack of legal authority in the current system with regard to enforcing sustainable development strategies and multilateral environmental agreements.[137] One regional group stated that the creation of new institutions should be a last resort, but could be desirable if it entailed the merging of institutions with complementary mandates.[138]

88. Some Member States suggested that reform of UNEP should strengthen its capacity and leadership to ensure United Nations system delivery to Member States on the environmental pillar of sustainable development.[139] Some Member States supported the upgrading of UNEP to a specialized agency for the environment. One Member State emphasized that both UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development should be strengthened to reinforce all three pillars of sustainable development.[140]

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[136] Brazil.

[137] Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future.

[138] ECA.

[139] Sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, Second Committee, statements by Germany, Mexico, Norway and Serbia.

[140] Brazil.

89. Many suggested the need for better coordination, alignment and collaboration among United Nations institutions,[141] including better utilization of existing United Nations coordination mechanisms. The latter should be supported by more coherent messaging from Governments across the governing bodies of different organizations.[142]

90. Some multilateral environmental agreements have made progress towards achieving greater synergies, notably in the chemicals and waste domain (e.g., the clustering of the secretariats of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants[143]) as well as at the intersection of forests, biodiversity and climate change.

91. All United Nations organizations are taking steps to operate as one system by harmonizing related programmes and dealing with national Governments through the United Nations "Delivering as one" initiative, which was launched in 2007 in eight pilot countries, with a ninth country (Montenegro) joining in 2009.[144] The Commission on Sustainable Development should be able to leverage the results of this new initiative as a platform for building the needed synergies for a more coordinated implementation of sustainable development at national levels.[145]

92. A number of recent improvements, such as greater use of the Environment Management Group, UN-Water and UN-Energy, were cited by one Member State as helping to identify and implement synergistic activity among existing instruments and actors; it was also suggested that reinvigoration of the concept of inter-agency coordination on sustainable development might further improve coordination within the United Nations system.[146]

93. One Member State has advanced a proposal for an "umbrella" structure within the United Nations focused on the promotion of sustainable development and implementation of multilateral commitments. This would serve to coordinate existing institutions, notably the Economic and Social Council, UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as the multilateral environmental agreements. It stressed the role of UNEP in helping countries to strengthen their capacities in the environmental domain, and in that regard urged implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building. It noted that the structural arrangement of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women could provide a model for discussion.[147]

94. At the regional level, there are several instances of cooperation among United Nations institutions. The United Nations regional commissions have been coordinating closely to produce joint analysis as an input to the preparations for the

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[141] South Africa.

[142] UNDP.

[143] Serbia.

[144] *How Delivering as One Adds Value: Stories and Testimonies from Eight Programme Pilot Countries* (June 2010). Available at http://www.undg.org/docs/11313/DaO-Thematic-Report_final.pdf.

[145] Japan, International Maritime Organization (IMO), others.

[146] United States.

[147] Brazil.

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. United Nations organizations are working together in the African region to assist NEPAD. It was suggested that, while the experience of the regional implementation meetings had been positive, the regional commissions could be further integrated into the Commission on Sustainable Development process.[148]

95. At the national level, one Member State noted that the diversity of contexts made any blueprint for the institutional framework neither desirable nor feasible.[149] In most developing countries, coordination of policy development and implementation across relevant agencies remained a challenge.[150] Most countries reported that active national sustainable development councils were in place, and that they included participation of major groups and other stakeholders, although young people are still underrepresented in many cases.[151] Those that did not have a national sustainable development council in place reported on various inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms. It is agreed that involvement of national sustainable development councils in preparations by countries for the Conference would be useful and should be promoted.

96. The overall effectiveness of national sustainable development strategies depends on many factors (economic, social, environmental) and on effective governance within national circumstances. Those that have been effective embody participatory approaches in development and implementation, effectively integrate the different dimensions of sustainable development, and are adequately resourced. National development plans and growth and poverty reduction strategies, linked to budget processes and contextualized within a country's long-term vision for sustainable development, as well as strategically linked to sectoral plans and complemented by subnational plans, could be quite effective.[152]

97. Often, the scope of a national sustainable development strategy is too narrow, focusing solely on environmental issues. Cultural, political and socio-economic aspects are not always adequately reflected. For example, while all the Pacific small island developing States have a national sustainable development strategy or a planning process that adheres to principles of sustainable development, the five-year review of the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy suggests that the integrated planning process needs improvement.[153] Most national sustainable development strategies in West Asia have failed to identify the optimum institutional and administrative arrangements needed to coordinate and implement their action plans, which are often not compatible with other sector strategies.[154]

98. To support implementation of national sustainable development strategies, one Member State suggested the establishment of an independent peer review mechanism drawing upon expertise from Member States that would help countries

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[148] Intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee, joint statement of the regional commissions.

[149] Brazil.

[150] Mauritius, others.

[151] Children and youth major group through the Conference youth caucus.

[152] ECA report on national sustainable development strategies. Available from www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/sdd/documents.

[153] ESCAP.

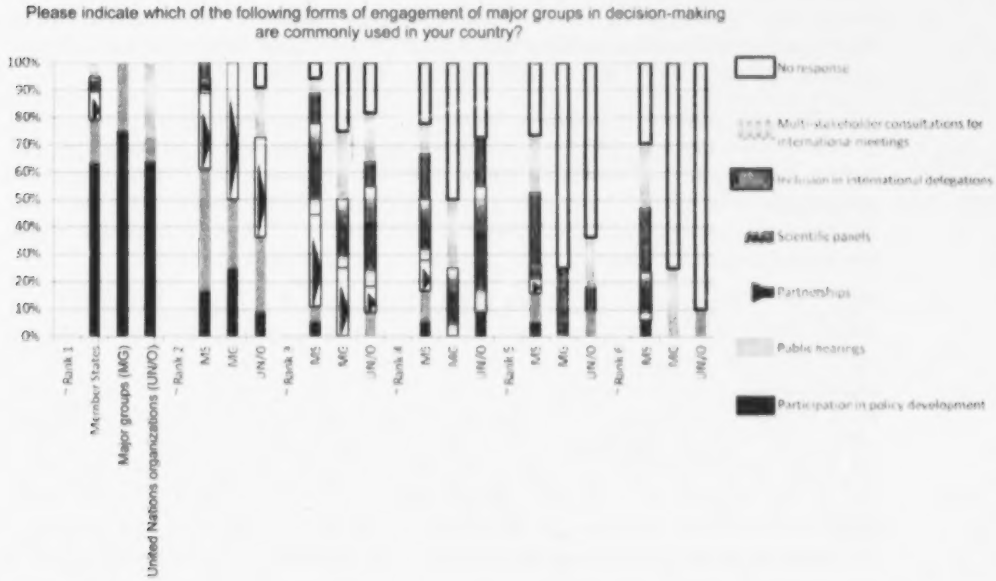
[154] ESCWA.

to identify gaps and address challenges faced in implementing sustainable development goals and targets.[155]

99. Subnational and local governments play a critical role in integrating national sustainable development policies into practical local programmes for urban and rural planning and management, along with fostering community and civil society participation in these programmes.[156] Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 emphasized the important role of local authorities in promoting sustainable development at the local level. Since 1992, thousands of municipalities throughout the world have formulated and implemented local Agenda 21 strategies, although they may not always be identified as such, having evolved and refocused their activities under different programmes.

100. Participation of major groups in national decision-making processes on sustainable development has significantly increased since 1992. Participation in policy development ranked as the most common form of engagement overall, followed by public hearings, partnerships and inclusion in scientific panels. Most United Nations system organizations also ranked multi-stakeholder consultations for international meetings high on the list (see figure VII).

Figure VII



101. Almost all Member States reported close collaboration with non-governmental organizations. Developed countries more often reported collaboration with trade unions, local authorities, business and industry and the scientific and technological community. Developing countries more often cited collaboration with women,

[155] South Africa.

[156] Second Committee, sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, statement by Israel.

indigenous people and farmers. Young people are consulted in fewer instances, but were mentioned by both developed and developing countries, as well as by United Nations organizations. The latter tend to reach out to all nine major group sectors based on the spectrum of their activities, but most often reported collaboration with business and industry or the scientific and technological community.

102. Major groups generally collaborate with the country or countries of interest to their organization and also reported on collaboration with United Nations organizations and with each other. The increased collaboration among some major groups themselves at the international level is an important development and strengthens their role and voice in international sustainable development institutions.

B. Success factors

103. Systematic institutional and governance reforms at the national, regional and international levels are essential to achieve sustainable development. Examples of effective institutional frameworks contributing to significant positive outcomes include the Millennium Development Goals, the creation of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the organization of the International Council on Mining and Metals, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention),[157] and the effective use of the regional commissions.

104. Relevant lessons include recommendations to build on existing institutions; promote collaboration, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness in partnerships; and ensure meaningful and equitable public access to international forums related to sustainable development by adapting and structuring their processes in a way that promotes transparency and facilitates the participation of those groups that might not have the means for participation without encouragement and support.

105. The Commission on Sustainable Development should strengthen its collaboration with the regional commissions and others for decision-making and for leveraging the participation of various United Nations agencies and funds in implementing intergovernmental decisions. While the Commission has had a good track record of involving civil society in its deliberations, it should make additional efforts to involve developing country civil society organizations.[158] Several responses noted that the Commission was tasked with too broad an array of policy issues that might be better integrated throughout other relevant bodies. At the same time, its function as a sustainable development forum could be enhanced by giving increased importance to side events, the Learning Centre and informal meetings.[159]

106. A number of specific lessons were drawn from experience at the national level: greater institutional strengthening through capacity-building is needed; even strong institutions cannot deliver sustainable development in the absence of appropriate and effective coordination mechanisms; and, to be effective, coordination

[157] ECE, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future.
[158] India.
[159] Sweden.

mechanisms should be led or chaired by strong cross-sector ministries such as finance or planning.[160]

107. These lessons could be relevant to the Commission on Sustainable Development in the sense that the Commission attracts only certain parts of Governments and that finance and planning ministers and ministries are not among the more frequent participants. However, the growing prominence of climate change and the green economy on the international agenda has begun to place the sustainable development agenda more centrally on the radar screens of economic ministries.

108. Partnership, dialogue and public participation through consultative processes, often through national sustainable development councils, were highlighted as highly effective means of strengthening the participation of major groups in national sustainable development efforts. Most major groups and United Nations system organizations responded that provision of the basic financial, human and technical advisory resources to support stakeholder groups to undertake sustainable development projects was paramount.[161] Bringing in those most affected by policies and decisions to speak on their own behalf,[162] involving them in concrete implementation of projects, and giving them occasion to set the agenda and have a formal role in decision-making processes were important.[163] Local governments often do not have the constitutional and legislative authority or ability to raise the resources necessary to address issues that have a direct impact on their communities. Increased national political commitment to local Agenda 21 plans would strengthen the participation of local authorities and other major groups in sustainable development efforts.[164] The Aarhus Convention was cited as one of the most effective means of strengthening participation, as it guarantees any person the right of access to information and participation in decision-making.[165]

C. Challenges

109. Some major challenges facing international institutions include: lack of political will, institutional capacity and technical capability; high competition for inadequate financial resources during a global financial crisis; complexity and scope of the sustainable development agenda; lack of coordination among organizations and agencies; low accountability and conflicting interests; competing short-term versus long-term priorities; weak or non-existent monitoring, reporting and evaluation; and creating effective and flexible partnership platforms that facilitate North-South and South-South two-way knowledge-sharing.[166]

110. Some major challenges facing national institutions include: lack of a mandate or high-level political commitment to engage stakeholders; weak engagement of major groups, in particular women and youth; ensuring effective and continuous inter-ministerial cooperation; varied commitments of countries to root sustainable

[160] UNDP.
[161] ITUC, IMO.
[162] Key organizations of women's major groups.
[163] ITUC, WWF, UNIDO.
[164] UN-Habitat.
[165] Italy, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, ECE.
[166] ECLAC, Caribbean regional report.

development in national institutions; achieving a balanced distribution of financial resources; ensuring coordination between local and national institutions; and inefficient and wasteful patterns of consumption and production.

D. Risks

111. The main risks to a successful outcome at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development relate to insufficient political will to reform the existing institutional framework, North-South and other divisions, and overall lack of commitment to cooperate at the international level.

112. For some, it is too early to state clearly what decision should be taken at the Conference on the overarching sustainable development framework, but most agree that the Conference will provide an opportunity for agreement on an intergovernmental environmental governance reform package. Others proposed decisions involving restoring the institutional balance among the three pillars and strengthening capacities to ensure effective implementation; providing a strong and predictable financial basis for action; ensuring effective participation by civil society in decision-making functions; and aiming to reach agreement on elevating the lead responsibility for sustainable development at the international level to the highest decision-making levels of the multilateral system.

113. Some noted that the leading role of the regional commissions in coordinating regional and subregional activities towards sustainable development, in accordance with chapter 38 of Agenda 21, must be preserved and strengthened within the context of reforms to the international institutional framework for sustainable development. Opportunities provided by existing regional and subregional institutions should be leveraged.

VII. The way forward

114. The questionnaire responses contain a number of useful suggestions and recommendations for consideration in the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which are summarized in a separate document posted at www.uncsd2010.org. In the present report, areas of apparent convergence are noted, as well as those where further discussion is needed to narrow differences at the second session of the Preparatory Committee.

Renewed political commitment for sustainable development

115. The intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee reaffirmed political commitment to the Rio Principles and ensuring their more consistent and effective application. Further discussion is required on how the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development will:

(a) Foster integrated decision-making based on sustainable development principles as a whole-of-government undertaking;

(b) Support a post-2015 Millennium Development Goals framework focused on sustainable development;

(c) Further enhance awareness-raising and transparency in information-sharing;

(d) Ensure corporate social and environmental responsibility in private sector decision-making.

Assessment of progress and remaining gaps

116. The process of developing integrated national sustainable development strategies has advanced. While mainstreaming sustainable development into economic planning processes is widely supported, further actions are needed to:

(a) Ensure that national budget allocations adequately reflect sustainable development priorities;

(b) Deepen work on sustainable development indicators, including the System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting;

(c) Include assessments of effects on poor and vulnerable populations;

(d) Institutionalize more inclusive access to information by poor and vulnerable groups;

(e) Increase investments in science and technology and build technological capabilities in all countries;

(f) Strengthen regulations and incentives for sustainable production and consumption;

(g) Phase out environmentally harmful subsidies.

New and emerging issues

117. The importance of strengthening international support for and capacity-building in countries most vulnerable to emerging sustainable development threats like climate change is unquestioned. However, more effort is needed to:

(a) Enhance early warning, disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction;

(b) Increase capacity-building to protect biodiversity and ecosystems;

(c) Raise agricultural productivity sustainably and ensure food security;

(d) Slow deforestation and extend sustainable forest management;

(e) Address challenges of rapid urbanization in developing countries;

(f) Strengthen links among scientific research, education and policy;

(g) Ensure that scientific research incorporates local knowledge.

Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

118. There is no consensus definition or model of a green economy. Rather, approaches will differ with national priorities and policy contexts. A green economy must be understood in relation to the Rio Declaration and Principles, and the development and poverty eradication agendas remain central for developing

countries. Progress on sustainable consumption and production can contribute significantly to a green economy.

119. Areas where there is need for further analysis and discussion include:

(a) Green sectors as new growth drivers: what are the opportunities for different groups of countries and how can they seize them?

(b) Scaling up investments in green infrastructure, green energy and other sectors: what are the options for mobilizing international investment?

(c) Institutions and policies to support a green economy: how can government capacities to design and implement fiscal incentives, regulation and legislation, sustainable procurement and policies to support green industries as new growth drivers be strengthened?

(d) Transition costs, in particular in resource-dependent economies: what are the needs of countries to minimize economic adjustment costs?

(e) Green economy and poverty eradication: how can green economy policies and measures best contribute to poverty eradication and social development?

(f) Green economy and technology: how can all countries be assured affordable access to technologies needed for a green economy?

(g) Green economy and trade: how can the development potential of environmental standards and labelling be enhanced to meet environmental and climate objectives while promoting development and trade.

Institutional framework for sustainable development

120. Most agreed that the institutional framework for sustainable development required strengthening, including better coordination among existing international institutions. Further progress is also needed at the regional and national levels.

121. Areas for further analysis and discussion include:

(a) International environmental governance: there is strong support for strengthening UNEP, with a range of options having been proposed;

(b) Sustainable development governance: options proposed include enhancing the effectiveness of the Commission on Sustainable Development in supporting implementation; strengthening the Economic and Social Council as an effective forum for multilateral discussion of the sustainable development agenda; and creating an umbrella structure for sustainable development within the United Nations;

(c) Enhancing coordination, coherence and cooperation: options include building on the chemicals and waste conventions model; better utilizing existing United Nations coordination mechanisms; and reinvigorating inter-agency coordination on sustainable development;

(d) Strengthening the leading role of the regional commissions in coordinating regional and subregional activities for sustainable development, in accordance with chapter 38 of Agenda 21;

(e) At the national level, creating or strengthening institutional mechanisms for joint work and collaboration across social, economic and environmental portfolios;

(f) Strengthening the capacities of local authorities, including for resource mobilization, as key actors in the delivery of vital economic, environmental and social services;

(g) Building upon progress to date for multi-stakeholder engagement in sustainable development decision-making and implementation, including through capacity-building tailored to different major groups and stakeholders.